

Using Fun to Learn

Ankit Shukla

Learning in the classroom requires constant effort from both, the teacher and the students. It requires an environment which acts as stimuli, because of the nature of the given task, the expectations of the learners, the ways in which information is presented – all these impact learning. We can easily see the different dimensions of learning and the way it happens with the help of examples, learning activities and the different ways in which children process their learnings. I realised these truths after being with the Azim Premji Foundation for almost three years and having visited many schools in the district assigned to me.

In 2019, the Chhattisgarh government had asked schools to remain open through the summer holidays and conduct various fun activities as a sort of summer camp in the school itself. As a result, I could engage with the students of three schools which were in the same campus. The moment I reached the school, students rushed to me as if we were old friends. Some boys were playing football, while some were busy with cricket. The puzzling thing was – there were no girls in the playground. They were all in their respective classrooms.

We went to the head teacher's office. He welcomed me and asked some of the boys to open the hall. Students started gathering in the hall and in a few minutes, the hall was jam-packed with boys and girls. I introduced myself and my objective of coming to the school.

Change in the air

On the first day, I divided them into groups. We had ten groups with about nine students in each. I distributed storybooks to each group, which they were asked to read and discuss among themselves. The discussion could be around the characters, the storyline (plot), the dialogues, etc. Based on these discussions, they had to prepare a play. Every member of the group read the stories and then, after discussion and consensus, they reached the final draft of the play.

On the second day, we had a brief story sharing session and character identification in the larger

group. Each group came and shared their story and spoke about the different characters in their stories. All this resulted in a puppet show.

Puppet show

After this, they started preparing puppets for their stories. The idea was to first draw a sketch of the face of the character, for instance, if there was a lion in the story, then they drew a lion's face and coloured it, after which, they pasted the sketch on a piece of cardboard to give the puppet support. After pasting, they attached a stick on the puppet. With this, their puppets for the show were ready! On the third day, we presented our play.

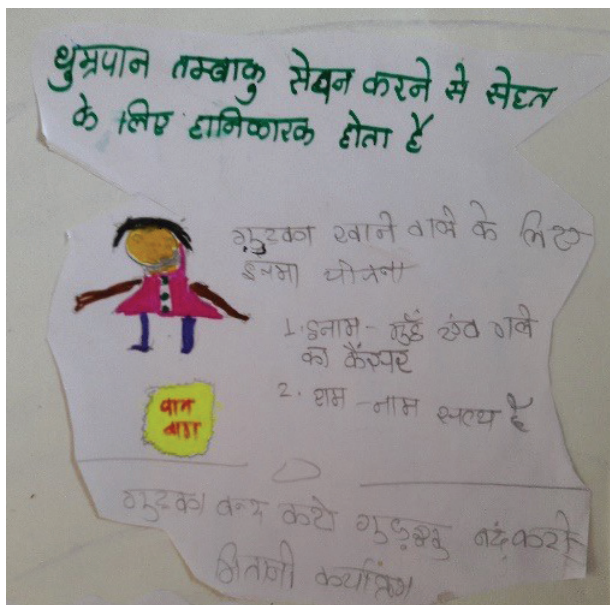
The stage was set. The students were behind a curtain, holding their stick puppets. They were placed such that only puppets could be seen in front. Each group came one by one and presented the play. The first play was ईमानदार लकड़हारा (The Honest Woodcutter). The students presented the act very beautifully with every detail in mind. After the act, each participant introduced themselves as well as the characters which they were playing. After the show, there was a question-answer round on the play. Some questions were raised - such as, what would have happened if the man had taken all the axes? Why did he choose the axe made of iron? The discussion which followed pushed these students to think about some real-life incidents.

The next play was, 'बड़ा कौन' (Who is the Greater One). The moral of the story, which came from the audience itself, was that no one can be ignored due to their size. Every organism on the earth deserves equal respect and dignity. The students were very excited and happy after the puppet show.

Baal Akhbaar

For the next activity, I asked the children to observe some new things that happen in their village. The next day, they had a lot to tell us. So, I first discussed the components of a newspaper with them - news, reports, advertisements etc. Then, again, I divided them into groups and gave them the task of writing whatever news they had.

It was amazing to see the minute details the children had observed. Many students had written about the previous day's downpour. As some of them owned vegetables and fruits shops, they had written how this rain had affected them.



Then came the advertisements. There were several advertisements -- shampoo, medicines and also, one of a school, highlighting the facilities provided in the school. The advertisement which caught my attention was the tobacco ad which pointed out the evils of smoking.

After collecting these from the students, the next step was 'publishing' the items as a paper, that is, pasting these articles on a chart paper. To do this, there was also a team called, 'Publishing Team' which had the responsibility of designing the paper. They pasted the news and advertisements

on the chart paper. Now we had the *Baal Akhbaar* - newspaper made by the children! The children felt a sense of achievement when it was displayed.

Children's learnings

After these activities, what the teachers and I found was that the students expressed themselves more. The activities had involved every student and given them the confidence to put their thoughts in front of everyone. The puppet show, with its rehearsals, also made them want to do their best. They improvised the stories in their own way which became a good way of language learning. The objectives of language teaching – that students should be able to visualise and become more creative and imaginative – seemed to have been achieved because the students had used their own imaginations and their thoughts while doing the show.

The *Baal Akhbaar* activity taught the students to be more conscious and observant. They noted minute details of everything that happened around them, which usually go unnoticed. The pasting of the news on the chart paper helped them to use their spatial sense, something that can be used in the teaching of mathematics. Expressing their experiences in the form of news and advertisements gave them the chance to put forward their thoughts.

All this helped me to understand that learning could happen anywhere: it could be in the classroom or in the playground. The only thing which we have to keep in mind is that we should keep the environment learner-friendly and completely fear-free. Every child should be given proper space to express himself/herself on any platform and learning will take place.

References

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Ankit Shukla joined the Azim Premji Foundation at Dhamtari as a Fellow in 2017. Currently, he is based in the Raigarh Block (Chhattisgarh) and is associated with mathematics. He has done MBA and B Tech from Uttar Pradesh Technical University, Lucknow. Before joining the Foundation, he worked as Program Manager in Bathinda on the project, *Strengthening Child Rights in Cotton Farming Districts of Punjab and Haryana* and as the District Project Coordinator for a multimedia campaign by *Jagran Peheh* on *Interlinkages between Tuberculosis and Diabetes Mellitus* in three states of India. He can be contacted at ankit.shukla@azimpremijifoundation.org